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14. ABSTRACT Despite the lopsided nature of contemporary air operations in combat against Islamofascism, the enemy has gained a measure of protection from air attack by savvy utilization of Information Operations. This protection is due to a concerted propaganda effort to discourage coalition air forces from utilizing a valuable weapon—airpower in all its forms. In considering methods to ensure freedom to employ friendly air and space power, this paper examines three classic enemy Information Operations attacks: the Monte Cassino Abbey bombing during World War II, the Chinese Embassy bombing in Belgrade during Operation ALLIED FORCE, and the accidental bombing of civilians interspersed with terrorists in Azizabad, Afghanistan in 2008. Taken together, these case studies highlight the importance of Crisis Communications in an overall Strategic Communications plan. Specifically, U.S. operational and strategic leaders must change their lack of acceptance of Crisis Communications as an essential warfighting obligation and adopt a robust education and training program to allow commanders to combat terrorists in this realm of the battlefield.					
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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

Damage Control: Leveraging Crisis Communications for Operational Effect

by

Andrew J. Gebara
Lt Col, USAF

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

31 October 2008

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Abstract

Despite the lopsided nature of contemporary air operations in combat against Islamofascism, the enemy has gained a measure of protection from air attack by savvy utilization of Information Operations. This protection is due to a concerted propaganda effort to discourage coalition air forces from utilizing a valuable weapon—airpower in all its forms. In considering methods to ensure freedom to employ friendly air and space power, this paper examines three classic enemy Information Operations attacks: the Monte Cassino Abbey bombing during World War II, the Chinese Embassy bombing in Belgrade during Operation ALLIED FORCE, and the accidental bombing of civilians interspersed with terrorists in Azizabad, Afghanistan in 2008. Taken together, these case studies highlight the importance of Crisis Communications in an overall Strategic Communications plan. Specifically, U.S. operational and strategic leaders must change their lack of acceptance of Crisis Communications as an essential warfighting obligation and adopt a robust education and training program to allow commanders to combat terrorists in this realm of the battlefield.

INTRODUCTION

On 31 Oct 08, as the United States Air Force enters its 6,655th day of continuous combat operations in support of U.S. national security objectives, it is useful to evaluate the extent to which our nation's enemies have been able to adapt to the coalition's asymmetric advantage in air and space. Since the enemy currently has no significant air defense at medium or high altitude, it stands to reason air operations should be able to function almost completely unfettered. Unfortunately, the notion that al-Qaeda and the Taliban have no air defense is woefully incorrect. The enemy's air defense lies in its Information Operations (IO) logical line of operation (LLO).¹ This IO LLO takes the form of a concerted propaganda effort to discourage coalition air forces from utilizing a valuable weapon—airpower in all its forms. Logically, the researcher's natural inclination goes therefore to the question: how can U.S. operational leaders adequately defend against the IO propaganda threat?

Controversial airstrikes are inevitable. Every effort must be made to minimize bombing errors, but history shows that despite our best efforts, some airstrikes will tragically go wrong. Similarly, the use of IO to degrade or defeat war-fighting advantages in the air is almost as old as airpower itself. Examples of IO to combat airpower can be found in World War I, World War II, the Cold War, Korea, Viet Nam, the Balkans, Iraq, and South Asia. In considering counter-IO strategies to ensure freedom to employ friendly air and space power, it is helpful to consider a few historical examples of when friendly forces experienced IO attacks. This paper will examine three classic enemy IO attacks: the Monte Cassino Abbey bombing during World War II, the Chinese Embassy bombing in Belgrade during Operation ALLIED FORCE, and the accidental bombing of civilians interspersed with terrorists in Azizabad, Afghanistan in 2008. These case studies each showcase a

different example of controversial airstrikes; each was used by the enemy to further its IO campaign. Taken together, they provide a powerful rationale for future training to counter this threat through the use of Crisis Communications (CRICOMM) techniques, a critical Public Affairs (PA) sub-capability of a campaign's overall Strategic Communications (SC) plan.² U.S. operational commanders have insufficiently adopted doctrine and measures in this regard, and must drastically increase the level of importance given to this vital arena of warfare.³ Specifically, U.S. leaders must change their lack of acceptance of CRICOMM as an essential warfighting obligation and adopt a robust education and training program to allow commanders to combat terrorists in this realm of the battlefield.

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

Monte Cassino Abbey, Italy, 1944

All decent people in the world were aghast by the news that one of the most venerable monuments of Christian culture, the Abbey of Cassino, has been destroyed by British and American bombers. And What Have You Gained? By thus violating this sanctuary of Christianity, your bombers have given us every right to incorporate the remnants of the Monastery in our system of defenses. The ruins have been turned by our men into a formidable fortress which has defied all your efforts during the past weeks and caused you an untold number of dead and maimed. Thus has your shameless crime boomeranged.

German Propaganda Leaflet, 1944⁴

The first case study describes not an example of an accidental bombing, or an airstrike gone tragically wrong, but rather an attack Allied forces knew would be controversial before it was executed: the bombing of Monte Cassino Abbey. The World War II Italian campaign was a far bloodier undertaking than is commonly perceived by the casual reader. Between September 1943 and August 1945, vicious fighting inflicted an estimated 320,955 Allied and 658,339 Axis casualties⁵: Europe's "soft underbelly"

proved in reality a “tough old gut.”⁶ Central to Luftwaffe Field Marshal (FM) Albrecht Kesselring’s exceptional defense of Italy were the hills surrounding Cassino.⁷ In an all out effort to take this key terrain, Allied combined arms forces conducted an incredible four assaults prior to the Monastery’s bombing, from 17 Jan – 11 Feb 44, all of which were unsuccessful.⁸

Debate raged within Allied command circles over the cause of this lack of success. Some commanders felt that an important reason was the presence of a suspected German artillery- observation post inside the 1,400 year old Benedictine abbey.⁹ The Abbey was built on the ruins of an old Roman temple, on top of the 1,700 feet high mountain, giving it a commanding view of the battlefield (see Figure 1).¹⁰



Figure 1. Monte Cassino Abbey – Contemporary View (reprinted from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Monte_Cassino_abbey_from_cemetery.JPG)

Complicating this tactical problem was Allied policy toward attacking cultural monuments.

On 29 December 1943, then-GEN Dwight Eisenhower promulgated the following order:

Today we are fighting in a country [Italy] which has contributed a great deal to our cultural inheritance, a country rich in monuments which by their creation helped and now in their old age illustrate the growth of the civilization which is ours. We are bound to respect those monuments so far as war allows. If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more and the building must go. But the choice is not always so clear-cut as that. Nothing can stand against the argument of military necessity. That is an accepted principle. But the phrase 'military necessity' is sometimes used where it would be more truthful to speak of military convenience or even personal convenience. I do not want it to cloak slackness or indifference. It is a responsibility of high commanders to determine through AMC Officers the locations of historical monuments whether they be immediately ahead of our front lines or in areas occupied by us. This information passed to lower echelons through normal channels places the responsibility on all commanders of complying with the spirit of this letter.¹¹

With this order in mind, the decision to bomb the Abbey was made only after weeks of debate. FM Sir Henry Wilson, General Eisenhower's successor as Allied commander-in-chief, Mediterranean approved the airstrike over the initial objections of GEN Harold Alexander, 15th Army Group Commander, LTG Mark Clark, U.S. 5th Army Commander, and LTG Ira Eaker, Commander-in-Chief of Allied Air Forces, Mediterranean.¹² LTG Sir Bernard Freyberg, commander of the New Zealand Corps tasked with taking the mountain, insisted on the action.¹³ General Freyberg finally forced approval from FM Wilson despite opposition: Generals Alexander and Clark in particular were concerned that General Freyberg could easily take his 5,000 troops out of the Italian campaign and return to the Pacific theater, a devastating blow to a theater already short on almost everything.¹⁴

After weeks of difficult fighting, the Abbey had become larger than life at all levels of command. To the average soldier, the Abbey was a source of great personal concern, as

described by SGT Evans, 2d London Irish Regiment: “It just had to be bombed. Oh, it was malignant. It was evil somehow. I don’t know how a monastery can be evil, but it was looking at you. It was all-devouring if you like—a sun-bleached colour, grim. It had a terrible hold on us soldiers.”¹⁵ Tactical commanders were no less frustrated at the failure to destroy what they saw as an obvious German post. Prior to the bombing, an unknown American artillery-battery commander was interviewed, “I have Catholic gunners in this battery and they’ve asked me for permission to fire on the monastery, but I haven’t been able to give it to them. They don’t like it.”¹⁶ This frustration had spread to the operational level of command, as exemplified by MG John Cannon, Commanding General of the 12th Air Force, who was quoted as saying “If you let me use the whole of our bomber force against Cassino, we will whip it out like a dead tooth.”¹⁷

General Eaker, who had been unconvinced of the presence of Germans in the Abbey, personally flew with LTG Jacob Devers, FM Wilson’s deputy, in a Piper Cub directly over the Abbey at an altitude of only 200 feet in an effort to put the controversy to rest.¹⁸ Generals Eaker and Devers landed convinced: they reported seeing a radio aerial on the Abbey and enemy soldiers moving in and out of the building.¹⁹ After this incredible tactical action by two operational level leaders, planning for the bombing accelerated. On 15 February 1944, a total of 254 B-17s, B-25s, and B-26s pulverized the Abbey,²⁰ thus bringing the Allies into the unhappy club of the Longobards, who destroyed the Abbey in 577 A.D., and the Saracens, who in 883 A.D. invaded, sacked, and burnt down the Monastery (see Figure 2).²¹ In hindsight, most, but not all historians now believe that while the Germans kept machine gun emplacements right next to the Abbey’s walls, no Germans were actually inside the structure.²²



Figure 2. Monte Cassino Abbey – After Allied Attack (reprinted from <http://digitallibrary.smu.edu/cul/gir/ww2/mcsc/italy/pages/mcs031it.htm>)

Chinese Embassy, Serbia, 1999

Serbian government officials rushed to the scene of the embassy blaze. One of them, Interior Minister Vlatko Stojkovic, told Chinese diplomats ‘these criminals have to stop bombing. It’s a demand of the whole world.’ There were initial conflicting reports of casualties. Senior Yugoslav official Goran Matic said there were no deaths among the 30 staffers living in the building. But Foreign Ministry spokesman Nebojsa Vujovic later said ‘there are deaths and injuries,’ without providing details.

Veselin Toshkov, 1999²³

The second case study is an example of the inevitability of error in combat operations. Operation ALLIED FORCE combat air and maritime operations began on 24 March 1999, after several months of unsuccessful negotiations between NATO and Serbia.²⁴ Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) GEN Wesley Clark felt that

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) objectives could be met with only a brief air offensive, as had been the case four years before during Operation DELIBERATE FORCE, when Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević's capitulation resulted in the Dayton Peace Accords.²⁵ Lt Col Paul Strickland describes the prevailing wisdom prior to the commencement of hostilities:

Contrary to sound doctrinal practice, senior military leaders believed "the political objective was to prompt Milosevic to accept the Rambouillet peace agreement, and NATO calculated that by dropping a few bombs Milosevic would do so."²⁹ At the outset of bombing, the MTL consisted of a meager 100 targets, of which slightly over 50 were approved for the initial air strikes. The lack of approved target sets perplexed General Short, who recalled thinking that "SACEUR had us all convinced we didn't need very many targets, and we didn't need an air campaign, and Milosevic just needed a little bit of spanking, and it was all going to be done. We never really ran an air campaign in a classic sense."²⁶

In contrast to General Clark, Lt Gen Michael Short, the Combined Forces Air Component Commander for Operation ALLIED FORCE, supported a "punishment" strategy that targeted Milošević's supporters in Serbia proper, vice the Serbian Third Army in Kosovo.²⁷ General Short argued "many times to his superiors that the most effective tactic for the first night of the war would be a knockout punch to Belgrade's power stations and government ministries. Such a strike had worked in Iraq in 1991, and it was the foundation of air power theory, which advocates heavy blows to targets with high military, economic, or psychological value as a way to collapse the enemy's will".²⁸

The result of this strategic and operational mismatch was a scramble for targets after Milošević refused to play into General Clark's plan. NATO attacks on Serbian targets gradually increased throughout the spring, until 7 May 1999, when a B-2 aircrew struck what they thought was the Federal Directorate for Supply and Procurement in Belgrade with five GBU-31 2000 lb. Joint Direct Attack Munitions.²⁹ Unfortunately, this target was in actuality

the Chinese embassy, killing three and wounding 20 noncombatant Chinese nationals (see Figure 3).³⁰



Figure 3. Chinese Embassy in Belgrade – After NATO Attack
(reprinted from
<http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9905/10/kosovo.china.03/>)

General Short describes his initial reaction when word of the bombing reached him:

And I said, ‘Impossible. I can’t imagine how we could have hit the Chinese embassy unless we just threw a bomb incredibly long or short. Let me do my homework and I’ll get back to you.’ So I called the Intel guys in, and said: ‘General Clark just says we hit the Chinese embassy. Get me a map and show where we targeted on Belgrade, and then where the Chinese embassy is.’ It wasn’t anywhere near our targets. I called General Clark back and I said, ‘Boss, I guess it could have happened, but I don’t know how. I don’t think we did. I think it’s bad reporting. I’ve looked at where the embassy is and where we targeted, and I just don’t see how we could have thrown a bomb there. It may be a missile went up and came back down.’ . . . But then CNN confirmed that we hit the Chinese

embassy. We clearly were stunned. This was not targeting that we had done--this was a target that was passed down to us as good solid target...³¹

Following the international outrage over the bombing, NATO forces were prohibited from attacking Belgrade for nearly the rest of the war, approximately 20% of the length of the operation.³² General Short detailed: “We had a circle drawn around downtown Belgrade, within which we couldn't hit anymore...It took the Rock and Roll Bridge off the table, and many of the headquarters off the table. It essentially cleared the sanctuary.”³³

There have been numerous conspiracy theories concerning the genesis of this tragic mishap, but the ultimate cause of this event was a series of tactical level blunders by civilian Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) analysts, who passed on the target to the military for prosecution.³⁴ While this incident naturally caused international condemnation, it was by no means isolated, according to the organization Human Rights Watch, which reports that between 489 and 528 Yugoslav civilians were killed in ninety different inadvertent strikes during Operation ALLIED FORCE.³⁵ Most of these strikes were initially denied, and only later grudgingly acknowledged by NATO officials.

Azizabad, Afghanistan, 2008

I think that airstrikes probably are the most discriminating weapon that exists. The problem is that even when you hit the right target, there are times when innocents pay the price...

Marc Garlasco, Human Rights Watch, 2008³⁶

The third case study highlights a hybrid of the first two examples: an airstrike where adversary combatants were killed as intended, but civilians were unknowingly interspersed with the enemy. During the early morning hours of 21-22 August 2008, Afghan and

coalition ground forces coordinated an attack within the limits of Azizabad, Afghanistan after they received intelligence that a known Taliban leader, Mullah Siddiq, was located within the village.³⁷ The force took fire from terrorists while approaching the village and called for close air support.³⁸ The resulting airstrike, conducted by an American AC-130 ‘Spectre’ gunship,³⁹ killed a large number of Afghans, estimated to be as many as 90 people (see Figure 4).⁴⁰



Figure 4. AC-130 ‘Spectre’ Gunship (Photograph courtesy of U.S. Air Force)

Immediately, Taliban spokesmen complained that the attack resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians: the U.S. denied those claims, insisting the dead were Taliban combatants.⁴¹ After cell phone video of casualties surfaced, revealing children among the dead, numerous U.S. and international investigations were launched into the incident; two weeks after the attack the U.S. announced that in addition to the Taliban fatalities as many as seven civilians had been killed in the attack.⁴² A news release from Combined Joint Task

Force-101 PA personnel defended the U.S. led initial investigation: “The investigating officer took statements from more than 30 participants, both Afghan and U.S., in the operation. Additionally, the investigating officer reviewed reports made by ground and air personnel during the engagement; video taken during the engagement; topographic photo comparisons of the area before and after the event including analysis of burial sites; reports from local medical clinics and hospitals; intelligence reports; and physical data and photographs collected on the site.”⁴³ The U.N. disagreed with this assessment: its investigation found “that some 90 civilians, including 60 children, were among those killed during military operations in the strife-torn nation’s western Herat province.”⁴⁴

Unfortunately for the innocents of Afghanistan, this sorry event is not isolated. In addition to the undocumented atrocities committed by the Taliban on civilians, the United Nations estimates that “more than 1,400 Afghan civilians were killed in the first eight months of this year. Of those, 395 were killed in airstrikes by Western forces. The number of civilians killed by U.S. and NATO-led airstrikes has risen by 21 percent this year.”⁴⁵

As a result of Azizabad and other high profile incidents, GEN David McKeirnan, NATO commander in Afghanistan, directed a radical change in combined arms tactics. BG Richard Blanchette describes the change to the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM Rules of Engagement: “commanders are now under orders to consider a ‘tactical withdrawal’ when faced with the choice of calling in air support during clashes in areas where civilians are believed to be present. The goal of the order is to minimize civilian casualties, encourage better coordination with Afghan troops and discourage overreliance on air power to repel insurgent attacks.”⁴⁶

ANALYTIC CONCLUSIONS

Given the extensive history typified by the above case studies, our adversaries traditionally seem to understand the operational and strategic value of IO more than U.S. military commanders. In his infamous letter to now deceased Iraqi insurgency chief Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, senior al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri described his strategic vision for IO attacks: “However, despite all of this, I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma. And that however far our capabilities reach, they will never be equal to one thousandth of the capabilities of the kingdom of Satan that is waging war on us.”⁴⁷

In his captured writings, al-Zawahiri clearly showed his operational and strategic acumen. In fact, if anything, the Zawahiri-Zarqawi letter underestimates the importance of a coherent and timely IO strategy to complement other LLOs in a modern campaign plan. This savvy has not been shared by many U.S. operational leaders, who often underestimate the importance of accurate, timely rebuttal to enemy IO attacks, instead focusing their efforts on an ultimately fruitless attempt to achieve zero-defect air wars. In all three listed case studies, the U.S. CRICOMM response was markedly weaker than the enemy’s attack.

After the Monte Cassino Abbey airstrike, German IO efforts began almost immediately.⁴⁸ The German Commander, LTG Fridolin von Senger brought the surviving 79-year old Abbot Gregorio Diamare to his headquarters, where the Abbot signed a statement and conducted radio interviews claiming that no soldiers had been within the enclosure of the monastery.⁴⁹ Roberto Rotondo describes the breadth and depth of the Nazi IO effort:

In Nazi-held Europe the Anglo-Americans were to be depicted in the days following the bombing as the new barbarians who were eager to systematically cancel every trace of “superior European civilization”. The abbey of Montcassino, which had been destroyed three times in the past - by the barbarians, the Saracens and by an earthquake - was now reduced to dust ‘by the Jews and by the Bolshevik fellow-travelers of Moscow, London and Washington’. But that was not enough, because Nazi intelligence...had an easy job in promoting the Germans as defenders of civilization: it had in fact been the Hermann Göring division which in December 1943 had brought to safety in the Vatican all the moveable works of art in the abbey, along with the immense library and its incalculably valuable codices.⁵⁰

It speaks poorly on Allied leaders that no one thought to prepare a response to Nazi propaganda efforts given almost two months of deliberations as to the fate of Monte Cassino Abbey. Incredibly, Marshal Wilson attempted to keep his reasons for ordering the destruction of one of the most cherished structures in Christianity secret! “Wilson stated that he had at least twelve pieces of “irrefutable evidence” about the military use of the monastery by the Germans, but he also wanted to keep them secret to prevent the Germans from constructing false counter evidence in consequence. It was promised that the evidence would be given to the Vatican in due time. That time has never arrived: even after the war it took investigation and controversial historical studies on documents in the military archives to conclude that it was the result of an error.”⁵¹ Failure to deal with this public relations nightmare enraged Catholics worldwide and contributed to the continued belligerence of the Italian Social Republic, the German puppet regime headed by Benito Mussolini in northern Italy from 1943-1945.

Similarly, the U.S. took two months to release its official report of causation in the Chinese Embassy bombing, well after the conflict had ended.⁵² After the mishap, Belgrade was essentially safe from attack: Serb IO attacks had completed a task the Serbian Integrated

Air Defense System could not. Recorded tapes of the B-2 attack on the Embassy undoubtedly existed, but were unable to be rapidly released due to security classification. The resulting effect of this inexcusably slow reaction was operational level harm to the NATO campaign plan. In contrast to the rapid response of Serbian propaganda experts the night of the attack, it took almost 11 months for Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet to fire one CIA officer and reprimand six others for their roles in the incident.⁵³

In Afghanistan, complaints of attacks on civilians are commonplace, more so because Taliban don't wear uniforms. Moreover, many Western media organizations simply report Al Qaida and Taliban claims as ground truth, despite evidence to the contrary. Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic & International Studies explains: "A great deal of media reporting focuses on claims that civilians were killed or wounded. Some of these claims are correct, but many simply report what is claimed by the Taliban, Al Qa'ida, and other sources; or by voices on the ground that claim not to have ties to insurgent activity in areas where UAVs, ground observers, and other IS&R (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) data make it clear that insurgents were present in the area and active at the target."⁵⁴

Internationally, the U.S. commander General McKiernan was seen as minimizing the issue until cell phone video of the aftermath forced additional investigations. Even after re-opening the investigation, General McKiernan chose to bring in a general from U.S. Central Command to lead the investigation. In his words, "In light of emerging evidence pertaining to civilian casualties in the August 22 counter-insurgency operation in the Shindand District, Herat province, I feel it is prudent to request that U.S. Central Command send a general officer to review the U.S. investigation and its findings with respect to this new evidence.

The people of Afghanistan have our commitment to get to the truth.”⁵⁵ While there is certainly nothing wrong with ensuring the truth gets out, this action risks being seen abroad as a further stall. This seeming inability to rapidly confront the enemy when they engage in IO attacks feeds right into the enemy’s strategic IO plan. Maj Gen Charles Dunlap explains:

The Taliban are keenly aware that if they can cause enough casualties or, ideally, take American or NATO prisoners as they swarm over the often sparsely manned positions, they will achieve a tremendous victory on the battlefield of public opinion. What is frustrating them? Modern U.S. and coalition airpower. Relentless aerial surveillance and highly precise bombing turn Taliban efforts to overrun the detachments into crushing defeats. And the Taliban have virtually no weapons to stop our planes. Instead, they are trying to use sophisticated propaganda techniques to create a political crisis that will shoot down the use of airpower as effectively as any anti-aircraft gun.⁵⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

History has shown that many U.S. operational leaders view airstrikes gone wrong as an unfortunate PA problem to be dealt with as painlessly as possible so as to get back to the real task of warfighting. At the service level, the U.S. Air Force does not define a PA mission to deal with this unfortunate inevitability. Air Force Instruction (AFI) 35-101, *Public Affairs Policies and Procedures*, thoroughly discusses the closest thing to such a mission: CRICOMM, including crisis actions, release of information to the media, and procedures to handle classified information.⁵⁷ However, AFI 35-101 discusses CRICOMM as to be applicable to a natural disaster or mishap, not combat. This perspective has caused great problems in the past and should be immediately discarded: CRICOMM operations must be considered an essential part of any modern kinetic air operation. As such, service instructions and doctrine should be rewritten to acknowledge this reality.

At the joint level, Joint Publication (JP) 3-61, *Public Affairs*, simply states “It is incumbent upon JFCs and their PAOs to accommodate the media whenever possible for three

basic reasons... Third, to counter adversary propaganda and erroneous information in the adversary's press. A commander's messages to the various publics must be timely, accurate, and project the purpose and scope of the mission."⁵⁸ This doctrine is logical as far as it goes, but it is a set of guidelines that leaves initiative in the hands of the enemy. Left unwritten is the concept that CRICOMM should be considered part of combat; failure to contest the enemy in an IO environment unnecessarily cedes a critical part of the battlespace. JP 3-61's sister document, JP 3-13, *Information Operations*, cites just one reference to CRICOMM in a 119 page document,⁵⁹ and the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Execution Roadmap for Strategic Communication, the Defense Department's attempt to synchronize IO, PA, and Defense Support to Public Diplomacy, fails to mention CRICOMM at all.⁶⁰ This appalling doctrine deficiency must be addressed. 'Accommodating the media whenever possible' is far from embracing CRICOMM as an essential, and inevitable, part of joint combat air operations.

Traditionally, there has been a natural uneasiness from service PA professionals concerning their place in the joint SC mission. AFI 35-101 explains that PA officers emphasize "truthful, credible, accurate and timely information to key audiences in order to enhance their understanding and appreciation for Air Force capabilities and contributions to national security, while maintaining due regard for privacy and communication security."⁶¹ In contrast, IO may necessarily include deception.⁶² While this unease is understandable, denying CRICOMM a place in a SC campaign plan is tantamount to ceding this critical war fighting aspect to the enemy: it must not be allowed to continue. This is not meant to advocate untruthful CRICOMM and a sub-category of PA operations; however, the importance of the CRICOMM mission demands an acknowledgement of its role in the SC

battlespace, a position advocated by former National Security Council member Colonel (ret.) Jeffrey Jones: “...that is not an argument to engage in propaganda; for the United States, truthful information is the best antidote and is exactly what its public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operators seek to provide.”⁶³

In addition to a modification of service and joint doctrine, U.S. and coalition operational and strategic commanders must change their mindset to acknowledge CRICOMM as a worthy facet of both SC and operational art, not a necessary evil to be handed over to PA junior officers as soon as possible. Commanders who are caught unprepared by an airstrike gone wrong, whether it was planned as at Monte Cassino, unplanned as at the Chinese Embassy, or planned but not with expected civilian casualties, as at Azizabad, are committing an inexcusable error in modern joint kinetic air operations. Air strikes will inevitably go wrong in the future, the only question that remains is: will operational and strategic commanders have the mental agility to defeat the enemy’s likely IO counter-attack?

It seems obvious that CRICOMM education must be encouraged from the highest levels of military leadership, and must be thoroughly addressed at both Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) Phases I and II. Until officers are educated in CRICOMMs importance and nuances, senior U.S. military commanders will remain at a disadvantage. Thankfully, minor efforts in this regard have recently been implemented at the JPME Phase II level: more must be incorporated.

Finally, CRICOMM scenarios should be included as a typical facet of air operations training, and CRICOMM must be integrated into joint operational level exercises, including but not limited to RED FLAG, Joint Expeditionary Force Experiment, JEFX, and the USAF

Weapons School syllabus. When an Air Force officer is pulled from a mission debrief in a Navy-hosted exercise to rapidly get in front of cameras and explain why simulated Marine bombs fell on Allied soldiers or civilians, we will have finally arrived at acceptable CRICOMM training.

Naysayers argue that SC's efforts are overblown; even some officers who publicly acknowledge CRICOMM's importance privately avoid it as much as practicable. The whole idea of media relations is uncomfortable to many officers. Admittedly, the concept that engaging the media is a chore to be avoided has been accepted by some leaders, but has been soundly rejected by others. What was the Doolittle Raid if not a kinetic attack to further a SC effort?⁶⁴ General of the Armies of the United States George Washington would have never fought the Battle of Trenton if he was not keenly aware of the necessity to bolster the image of the Continental Army as an unbeaten force.⁶⁵ In both these examples, U.S. leaders recognized the primacy of SC for mission execution, and the importance of the SC plan to the overall war effort to great effect.

This attitude is underscored by former Vietnamese military commander Senior General Võ Nguyên Giáp, who stated "We paid a high price [during the Tet offensive] but so did you [Americans]...not only in lives and materiel...Do not forget the war was brought into the living rooms of the American people...The most important result of the Tet offensive was it made you de-escalate the bombing, and it brought you to the negotiation table. It was, therefore, a victory...The war was fought on many fronts. At that time the most important one was American public opinion."⁶⁶

Similarly, CRICOMM, well executed as part of an overall SC plan, can maintain the freedom to operate that operational commander's need. General Dunlap explains the

importance of this mission in the Global War on Terror context, “We must not reward the Taliban for deliberately putting civilians at risk; it will only encourage them -- and others -- to make increasing use of innocents as defensive shields. The world will become an even more dangerous place for the truly blameless. The grim reality is that if our forces in the field are deprived of their most effective weapon more than just coalition troops will die.”⁶⁷

FINAL REMARKS

When considering the question, “How can U.S. operational leaders adequately defend against the IO propaganda threat?” the need for a robust CRICOMM effort to complement the overall SC plan is clear. This research paper detailed three historical case studies of airstrikes gone wrong: Monte Cassino Abbey in 1944, the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999, and Azizabad, Afghanistan in 2008. While exceptional, these examples are far from unique. Kinetic air operations may indeed be surgical when compared to other types of fires, but they are in no way infallible, and ultimately mistakes are inevitable. In each cited example, U.S. operational leaders allowed the enemy to use IO in the form of propaganda to undermine U.S. and coalition objectives. U.S. leaders need to modify the conventional wisdom of CRICOMM as a necessary evil, and instead embrace it as an inevitable part of warfare, no different than tactics or logistics. Only by adopting a robust education and training regimen in SC and its sub-capability of CRICOMM will U.S. leaders be able to deny the enemy this critical LLO and maintain the freedom to prosecute operations in support of friendly operational and strategic objectives.

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